Michael Harman earns MMR 317

Mike was born into a military family in 1955. He is employed as a graphic designer at Rueff Sign Company and is the father of two sons and a daughter. His wife believes model railroading is a waste of perfectly good basement space. Mike has a different opinion.

Mike began model railroading during the spring of 2001 after visiting a local train show to purchase a few additions to his son's wooden train set. He remembered how much fun he had when he was eight years old, launching his cast F-unit off of turn three into an aeronautical and visual display of speed and grace. He put a lot of dents into the wall.

A lot older, a tad bit wiser and hopefully more appreciative of the value of a locomotive purchase, he decided to look into the hobby as an adult. His recent purchase of a new home provided him the available space to construct a layout in the basement.

After a few trips to the local hobby shops, he started on his first true layout. His track plan consisted of laying as much track into as small an area as possible as his paycheck could afford. Needless to say, that venture failed miserably. He sought advice from a few local shops and started over.

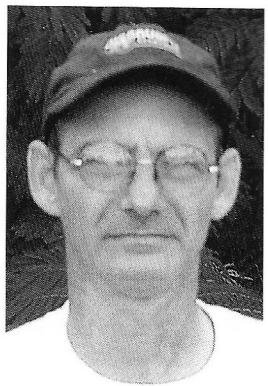
Mike was introduced to a very active NMRA member, Bob Johnson, at a weekly lunch group of Lionel guys. He was also introduced to Jack Diehl, who in a lot of people's opinion, "saved" him from a life of high-speed toys, and bolstered his interest in the finer scales by inviting him to join the K&I Modular Railroad Club.

Within a couple of months of intense construction, he was up and running on a fairly decent set of rails at home and had constructed a module. Bob Johnson asked Jack and Mike to act as tour guides, and chaperone the home layout tour bus trips during a convention. Mike finally got the chance to visit some local home layouts. This exposure allowed Mike to befriend Miles and Fran Hale. These two active and accomplished individuals have had the most influence on his model railroading.

Mike enjoys all scales and gauges and has built models in most. The larger scales have allowed him to incorporate more details into his work as a professional designer in the advertising and sign industry. His limited basement space and interests in art have provided him an ideal niche in HO and HOn3 to express his talents and skills in three-dimensional renderings of railroad scenery. He is a modeler.

To expand his skills on a budget, he looked to the magazines for guidance, absorbing all the information he could. The older issues were cheaper and Mike found himself learning about the hobby's history and a lot of skills that are being lost. He learned to hand lay track, build his own turnouts, locomotives and structures. He found new projects in each yellowing edition, as well as an appreciation for the pioneers who have kept this hobby alive.

He found out about the NMRA's Achievement Program during a visit to the website. By simply following the requirements for each category, he found his skill level improved dramatically with each project. Using the program as a guide, he once again completely disassembled his layout and started with a fresh framework.



This time, each model, each wire, every piece of track was documented and submitted for merit award judging. Some models made it to NMRA contests. Every one he entered earned an award of some level.

He became so engrossed and so convinced in the AP program's benefits to the membership, he volunteered to chair his Division's AP program. What the AP had done for him, it can do for everyone. Being involved in the program has put him one-on-one with the finest model railroaders in the world. If you have met Mike, he has learned something from you. Most people are not even aware of it happening, but even if only in passing, he has made a point of noticing something worthwhile in that brief encounter, and incorporated it into his work in some fashion. Through his involvement in the AP program, he is able to pass that knowledge onto others. It is Mike's philosophy that everything you learn should be shared with at least two other modelers without the expectation of compensation.

Mike holds AP certificates in Motive Power, Cars, Structures, Scenery, Civil Engineering, Electrical Engineering and Model Railroad Author.